

***United States Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science and Transportation***

***Hearing on
The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children***

***March 21, 2000
9:30 a.m.***

Opening Statement of U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback

- \$ Good morning. I want to thank my friend and Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain for agreeing to hold this hearing, and for offering a forum to discuss what has become an important public issue.
- \$ We are privileged to hear from a most distinguished panel of witnesses today. I appreciate your presence here.
- \$ But I think it is also important to note who is NOT here today. In putting together this hearing, we invited a wide variety of video, PC and arcade industry executives to testify. We invited the leaders of their trade associations to testify. And when each of them claimed to have a terribly important meeting at this exact time, we extended the invitation to *any* member of their company who could represent them. And still, in every single case, we were refused.
- \$ It is disappointing that the executives at Sega, Hasbro, Hasbro Interactive, Nintendo, ID Software, Midway Games, the Video Software Dealers Association, the American Amusement Machine Association, and the Interactive Digital Software Association could not be here today. All them represent powerful and profitable communications companies. But none of them apparently felt they needed to communicate with the United States Senate. Nor is this the first time that some of these companies have refused an invitation to testify. This is a shame, but more than that, it is shameful. It shows contempt for Congress. It cannot continue.
- \$ We are here today to discuss the potential impact of an increasingly powerful entertainment medium. Over the past several years, the video, PC, Internet and arcade industry has dramatically increased in terms of profitability and pervasiveness. Video games are no longer relegated to a corner of the pizza parlor; they are now the basis of movies, the inspiration for numerous toys, costumes, magazines, and electronic spin-offs; and are found in an increasing number of homes.

- \$ A few months ago, a study was released by the Annenberg Institute of the University of Pennsylvania which found that the average child in America spends more than four and a half hours a day in front of a screen **B** watching TV, playing video and PC games, and surfing the internet. Kids spend more time staring at a screen than they do in school, or with their parents **B** which means that what they watch, and what they play, can have a profound influence on their young minds, and young lives.
- \$ When it comes to violent television and movies, literally thousands of studies have pointed to a negative link between watching violence and anti-social behavior, responses and attitudes. But despite the skyrocketing popularity and profitability of violent video games, the impact and influence of these games has largely escaped public and parental attention.
- \$ Of course, the majority of video and PC games produced are non-violent. Many are educational, as well as entertaining. Some teachers have praised certain games for their effectiveness in teaching math and motor skills. But there are many games, sold in toy stores across the country, advertised in venues accessible to children, and demonstrably popular among young people, which celebrate killing, carnage, and cruelty.
- \$ Consider just a few examples:
- \$ The highly popular game **A**Duke Nukem[®] combines the graphic killing of aliens with images of scantily clad women. Advanced players get to murder naked female prostitutes, some of whom are tied to posts and beg the player to kill them.
- \$ The games **A**Carmageddon[®] and **A**Twisted Metal[®] cast the player as a deranged motorist, whose aim is to run over as many pedestrians and other drivers as possible. The more bystanders you kill, the higher your score.
- \$ In **A**Grand Theft Auto 2[™], players can engage in drive-by shootings, drug dealing, and car theft as they simulate gangster activity.
- \$ These may seem over the top, but they are actually among the more popular games around. In fact, one survey of fourth-to-eighth graders found that almost half the kids said their favorite electronic games involved violence.
- \$ Defenders of these games say that they are mere fantasy, and harmless role-playing. But is it really the best thing for our children to play the role of a murderous psychopath? Is it all just good fun to positively reinforce virtual slaughter? Is it truly harmless to simulate mass murder?
- \$ That's part of what this hearing is about. We want to take a hard look at these products, and their impact. If a typical child spends up to an hour a day playing video and PC games, it simply stands to reason that these experiences will have some impact on their thoughts and feelings. It is simply part of human nature that what we experience affects our attitudes and assumptions, and thus, our decisions and behavior. The way in which they affect us is bound to be complex and variable. But we need to start asking questions, and getting answers.

- \$ Raising children is a precious duty and a precarious task. It requires nurture, sacrifice, and lots of love, time, and attention. But even the most devoted parents may find it impossible to always know what their child is playing, or to shield their child from images and messages that surround them at school, at the mall, at a friend's house, or at an arcade. Many devoted, loving parents may not know about the messages of these games. They may not know that their children can participate in murder simulations at the local arcade. And even if they do know, they cannot always shield them from harmful influences. We can no more shield our children from a polluted culture than we can shield them from polluted air.
- \$ Parents of course have primary responsibility to protect, raise and care for their children. But that doesn't mean that companies have carte blanche to confuse and corrupt them. We all have a role to play in protecting and caring for children, and in doing what we can to make our country safer and our society more civil. I am hopeful that some of the testimony we will hear today will shed light on a subject that has generated so much heat.